



***Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
December 31, 2012 - January 4, 2013***

Harper to meet with First Nations chiefs Jan. 11: Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike goes into 25th day

[CBC News](#)

Jan 4, 2013 9:59 AM CST



As Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike continues for its 25th day, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's office has announced that he will attend a "working meeting" with a delegation of First Nations chiefs on Jan. 11.

"This working meeting will focus on two areas flowing from the [2012 Crown-First Nations] Gathering: the treaty

relationship and aboriginal rights and economic development," said a release issued Friday morning by the prime minister's office. "While some progress has been made, there is more that must be done to improve outcomes for First Nations communities across Canada."

On Thursday evening, an Assembly of First Nations effort to broker an end to Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike and address the Idle No More protest movement appeared to have stalled, with Spence saying she can't sustain her hunger strike until the chiefs' previously proposed Jan. 24 talks with the prime minister and Governor General.

It's not clear whether Spence will be at the meeting. A spokesman for her, speaking at a press conference in Ottawa Friday, didn't answer a questions about whether she would attend, but reiterated that her hunger strike would continue until the meeting happened.

New Democrat MP Charlie Angus, who was also at the press conference, said the organizing is up to the Prime Minister's Office and the Assembly of First Nations.

Early Friday morning, a news release issued by Spence — who, despite frigid temperatures, remains camped out with her supporters on Victoria Island in the Ottawa River between downtown Ottawa and Gatineau, Que. — says that as the 25th day of her hunger strike begins, "her message is becoming more crucial."



Shawn Atleo, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, brushes off questions from reporters as he makes his way to a meeting with Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence on Thursday. (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

"This is a crisis, and we cannot continue on this path of social indifference," Spence says in the release, reiterating her call for an "urgent" meeting on the

implementation of treaties between First Nations and the Crown.

On Thursday, Spence's camp said this meeting needs to happen within 72 hours and suggested protests across Canada sympathetic to her cause could escalate.

Cannot sustain strike

Friday's statement quoted Spence spokesman Danny Metatawabin as saying the chief "cannot physically sustain her hunger strike" until Jan. 24, a meeting date proposed earlier by the AFN, which is calling for Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor General David Johnston to meet with chiefs from across Canada on the first anniversary of their 2012 Crown-First Nations gathering.

Metatawabin told reporters that he visited Spence Friday morning and "she's well, but you can tell her body is weak."

AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo and other regional chiefs from northern Ontario were on Victoria Island Thursday, meeting with Spence in an apparent effort to broker some sort of compromise solution that could respond to demands without further endangering anyone's physical well-being. Atleo said little as he left, however, apparently unsuccessful in his efforts.

Atleo has been meeting with officials from the prime minister's office behind the scenes in an effort to address not only Spence's hunger strike but the concerns of the Idle No More protest movement more generally.

It's not clear whether Spence would even accept a meeting between national chiefs and the prime minister as an adequate response to her demands.

Some involved with the movement have suggested theirs is a grassroots protest and the elected national chiefs cannot represent their interests because they are part of the system that has failed them in the past.

Protests escalate

Spence is not alone on her hunger strike. Cross Lake, Man., elder Raymond Robinson has also gone without food since Dec. 11.

The CBC's Adrienne Arsenault reports that while Spence is weak and reporting some pain, she remains upbeat and takes a daily walk with her friends and supporters.

Arsenault says Robinson is not faring as well, telling her yesterday that he's lost more than 30 pounds and is having trouble standing up straight because of his pain.

In a separate development, a release issued Friday morning by the Siknihtuk Mi'kmaq Rights Coalition in New Brunswick said the group has notified the RCMP that it plans to block CN Rail trains from transporting goods along the Highway 126 rail line in Adamsville, N.B., between now and Monday.

The release says the chosen location is a historical trading post where Mi'kmaq people bartered their handmade baskets for goods with local settlers.

Previously, Mi'kmaq protesters from Elsipogtog held a four-day traffic slow down along Highway 11. The group is calling for recent federal legislation to be abolished or stopped, saying it infringes on their treaty rights and human rights.



Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence is helped back to her teepee after meeting supporters on Victoria Island near Ottawa Thursday. Spence began a hunger strike Dec. 11, calling for a meeting with the prime minister and governor general to discuss her First Nation's urgent treaty issues. (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

First Nations chiefs contemplate 'breach of treaty' declarations, indefinite economic disruptions

[APTN National News](#)

January 1, 2012

Jorge Barrera

First Nations leaders have discussed plans to launch country-wide economic disruptions by the middle of January if Prime Minister Stephen Harper doesn't agree to hunger-striking Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence's demand for a treaty meeting, *APTN National News* has learned.

During three days of meetings and teleconferences, chiefs from across the country discussed a plan setting Jan. 16 as the day to launch a campaign of indefinite economic disruptions, including railway and highway blockades, according to two chiefs who were involved in the talks who requested anonymity.

"The people are restless, they are saying enough is enough," said one chief, who was involved in the discussions. "Economic impacts are imminent if there is no response."

Chiefs were still finalizing details of their plans Monday evening and it remained unclear to what extent their discussed options would translate into the official position.

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo is expected to write Harper a letter outlining the chiefs' position.

Spence launched her hunger strike on Dec. 11 to force a meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Governor General David Johnston and First Nations leaders to discuss the state of the treaties. Spence said in a statement issued Monday that the aim of the meeting was to "re-establish" the treaty relationship and finally put First Nations people in their "rightful place back here in our homelands that we all call Canada."

The plan of action comes as the Idle No More movement continues to sweep across the country through round dances, rallies along with highway and rail blockades.

The Tyendinaga Mohawks briefly blockaded a main CN rail line between Toronto and Montreal Sunday, stranding about 2,000 Via Rail passengers. The Mi'kmaq from the Listuguj First Nation, Que., continue to hold a rail blockade on a CN line along with members of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation who have shut a CN line in Sarnia, Ont. In British Columbia, the Seton Lake Indian Band ended a rail blockade on Sunday.

How the chiefs' action plan will mesh with the Idle No More movement remains to be seen. Idle No More organizers issued a statement Monday that distanced the movement from the chiefs.

"The chiefs have called for action and anyone who chooses can join with them, however, this is not part of the Idle No More movement as the vision of this grassroots movement does not coincide with the visions of the leadership," said the statement, posted on the Idle No More Facebook page. "While we appreciate the individual support we have received from chiefs and councillors, we have been given a clear mandate by the grassroots to work outside the systems of government and that is what we will continue to do."

One of the chiefs involved in action plan discussion said the leadership wanted to be sensitive to the grassroots-driven movement and make clear that their plans are being developed in support and as a response to Idle No More.

"Chiefs are standing firm in support of Idle No More and grassroots citizens," said the chief. "We now need to unify."

The meetings and teleconferences included between 50 to 60 chiefs from British Columbia to the Maritimes, according to the sources.

During the discussions, some First Nations leaders suggested individual communities and treaty regions issue "breach of treaty" declarations beginning Jan. 1 and leading up to Jan. 16. Aside from blockades, chiefs discussed stepping up rallies at MP's offices, continuing letter campaigns and launching Twitter bombs.

"All we are doing is reasserting our own sovereign right and inherent right within this treaty," said a second chief, who was also involved in the discussions. "The time has come that they need to see we are a sovereign entity, we have and always will be because of the relationship of treaty that was entered into by the Crown and numerous nations."

There are also plans to hold ceremonies and vigils in Ottawa between Jan. 10 and 13 in support of Spence, who entered into day 21 of her hunger strike on New Year's Eve.

"Those are going to be in response, either to a response from the prime minister, or to prepare for a potential and imminent impact on Canada's economy as a result," said one of the chiefs.

The chief, however, stressed that the leadership is taking their direction from grassroots citizens who are tired of the state of things.

"Our people are growing frustrated, they are tired of the impoverished conditions and mining companies coming to our treaty territories to take what is left," said the chief. "What we are now seeing is our grassroots citizens are saying enough is enough."

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Aboriginal radio station in N.W.T. back on air: Dept. of Canadian Heritage, which helps fund CKLB, says station has not filed necessary documents

[CBC News](#)

Jan 3, 2013 8:50 AM CST

Fans of CKLB Radio in the Northwest Territories are tuning in once again after the aboriginal station was off air for five days over the holidays.

A message posted to the station's website said it had to shut down because federal funding it normally gets was nine months late.

While CKLB is back in business, it's not out of trouble.

The Department of Canadian Heritage is one of the station's main sources of funding. It said it has not cut funding to CKLB. It added that it has doubled the station's annual funding in recent years.

A department spokesperson said the station has not received all of its money because it has not filed necessary documents as part of its agreement with the federal department.



The Department of Canadian Heritage said the station has not filed necessary documents yet. A spokesperson for the department said that once it does, it will get the rest of its funding. (CBC)

"My observation from two years ago, three years ago, back even four years ago there was a problem for lack of funding for a lot of things," said Jim Hope, a past employee at the station.

Hope said that since CKLB underwent new management, information about how the station's money is spent has become private.

The Department of Canadian Heritage said that once they get the appropriate documentation, the station will get the rest of its money.

Idle No More campaigners summon big noise, crowds at Vancouver's Waterfront station

[Calgary Herald](#)

January 3, 2013

Stephanie Ip



First Nations drummers at the Idle No More rally at Waterfront station in Vancouver on January 2, 2013.

Photograph by: Gerry Kahrman, PNG

VANCOUVER — Hundreds of people packed Vancouver's Waterfront station on Wednesday to show their support for aboriginal issues, as the Idle No More

campaign continued to gather steam across Canada.

Wednesday's rally saw a crowd of about 300 fill the downtown transit hub around 3 p.m., many clutching drums and wearing traditional First Nations regalia.

Others hoisted signs above their heads with various slogans in protest of the federal government's Bill C-45.

The bill would make changes to the Indian Act, allowing aboriginal people to lease or sell their land.

While some believe this will put more decision-making power into the hands of First Nations communities, others fear it will impede on land and treaty rights and, in turn, on aboriginal traditions.

"These teachings belong to us and we are passing them on to our children," Christie Charles declared to the crowd as she held her seven-month-old son Allistir in the middle of Waterfront station's main lobby.

"I'm standing here with my children because this is our teaching — to stand up for future generations."

Charles' sentiment was applauded by cheers, chants and drumming — a sound that echoed thunderously throughout the commuter hub.

Many families attended with their children, who also wore traditional regalia and held signs.

The wall-to-wall crowd took over the station's entrance to the Canada Line and saw a number of commuters stop to take in the speakers and chants, while other onlookers stood up on benches to get a better look.

Rebecca Campbell of the Squamish Nation said it's time for Canadians who aren't of First Nations descent to take notice of Bill C-45's effects.

"Even Canadians as one — it'll affect everybody ... who wants to depend on our land and resources. It not only affects us as native people ... but also other Canadians," Campbell said.

"Everybody has the same rights to air, to breathe — it's the exact same equivalent."

The downtown rally lasted about an hour before moving outside of Waterfront station, where a crowd of about 50 remained to continue listening to speeches from local aboriginal leaders.

The movement, which has largely been organized through social media, highlights a growing restlessness among aboriginal communities toward the way First Nations matters are being handled by the government.

According to Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, Bill C-45 represents a “dark” treatment by Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government of First Nations communities.

In B.C., the RCMP and the Vancouver Police Department’s treatment of missing women’s investigations throughout the ‘90s also struck a chord and helped foster support for the Idle No More movement.

Another rally in support of Idle No More is slated for Saturday at the Peace Arch border crossing. There are calls for blockades at U.S. border crossings but these have not been endorsed by organizers.

The rally in downtown Vancouver came the same day spokespeople for Chief Theresa Spence said the Idle No More movement “is becoming more volatile.”

Spence has been on a hunger strike since Dec. 11 and will continue until Harper agrees to meet with her.

Harper has made Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan available for meetings but Spence has declined.

— with files from Postmedia and CP

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First Nation leaders to meet as Idle No More movement ‘becoming more volatile’

[National Post](#)

Jan 3, 2013 12:45 PM ET

First Nations leaders are meeting today to clarify the demands of hunger-striker Chief Theresa Spence, in the hopes of getting closer to a resolution of recent unrest.

National Chief Shawn Atleo is meeting several key regional chiefs from the area surrounding Spence's Attawapiskat reserve in northern Ontario.

Spence's spokespeople said Wednesday in a written statement that the situation "is becoming more volatile" with each passing day that Prime Minister Stephen Harper doesn't meet with Spence.

At the same time, Atleo has issued what he calls an urgent invitation to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Gov. Gen. David Johnston to meet chiefs on Jan. 24 _ the one-year anniversary of Harper's summit with First Nations.

"First Nations across this country have been voicing concern and frustration with a broken system that does not address long-standing disparities between First Nations and the rest of Canada," Atleo said in a news release.

"There is no excuse for inaction either by First Nations leadership or by Canada."

Spence is now on the 24th day of her liquids-only hunger strike, and her spokesman says she is fragile.

"Time is of the essence now, the state of her health is weakening," Danny Metatawabin said in a statement issued Wednesday.



Cole Burston / The Canadian Press
Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence talks with her family and Native American actor Adam Beach and daughter Phoenix Beach as she continues her hunger strike in a teepee on Victoria Island in Ottawa in late December.

TORN FIRST NATIONS FLAG LEFT ON ALBERTA MAYOR'S LAWN

A community southwest of Calgary is taking extra security precautions after a flag from a nearby reserve was found shredded on the mayor's lawn.

Mayor John Welsh of Redwood Meadows is worried the act of vandalism could hurt relations between the town and the Tsuu T'ina First Nation.

The flag, which was raised at the town office last year, was stolen from the Redwood Meadows administration office.

Welsh says there's concern that the flag was targeted in retaliation to the Idle No More protests by First Nations across Canada.

The Redwood Meadows townsite is on land leased from the Tsuu T'ina.

Town council and individual residents are offering a \$500 reward for information leading to an arrest.

"We do not support this in any way, shape or form, not only as a council board, but as residents within the community," Welsh said.

"Some members of the community are actually stepping up, not only to add to the reward, but have started a petition demonstrating our disgust with the behaviour exhibited here."

CONFUSION OVER DEMANDS

Spence is demanding discussions with Harper and Johnston about revisiting the treaty rights of First Nations, although the scope of her demands has left government officials puzzled.

Harper has not agreed to meet Spence, but Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan has tried repeatedly to speak with her, to no avail.

"We urge an end to illegal blockades and expect the rule of law to be upheld," Harper spokesman Andrew MacDougall did say Wednesday.

In recent letters to Spence and a letter to Atleo in November, Duncan has proposed a First Nations-federal government working group on treaty implementation and a



separate discussion on comprehensive claim negotiations.

"Our government remains committed to creating the conditions for healthier, more self-sufficient First Nation communities," Duncan's spokesman said in an email statement

Thursday. "We continue to believe that the best way to make progress on our shared priorities — education, housing, clean drinking water and economic opportunity — is by working together."

Robin Rowland / The Canadian Press Members of the Haisla First Nation march in Kitimat, B.C. as part of a rally in support of the Idle No More movement on Sunday.

But since the exchange of letters and promise for treaty talks in November, tension has escalated. Grassroots protests under the Idle-No-More banner have broken out across the country and there have been several blockades of transportation corridors.

Spence says there will be more of this and threatens "countrywide economic disturbances," unless Harper meets her.

On New Year's Day, a close aide to Spence sent a letter to the founders of Idle No More which quotes Spence as saying that chiefs "must humble themselves and be one with the brave grassroots citizens of our nations.

"(Spence's) message is that the chiefs must and will redeem themselves despite an imperfect past; the time has come for the leaders of our nations to become one and the same as the people," reads the letter from Angela Bercier.

"The chiefs have made mistakes in the past, but don't shame them for these. They are, after all, our people. The chiefs are ready now to humble themselves for the people."

Atleo, however, stresses the need for peaceful protest and concrete solutions.

"It's time for the Crown to honour its relationship and responsibilities to First Nations starting with the recognition and affirmation of our inherent and treaty rights," he said. "It's time for all First Nations citizens and their leaders to drive solutions."

Canadian Press and Postmedia News

Chief on hunger strike demands action within 72 hours

[The Globe and Mail](#)

Jan. 03 2013, 11:37 AM EST

Gloria Galloway



Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence is helped back to her teepee after greeting and welcoming supporters as they visit her on Victoria Island in Ottawa on Thursday, January 3, 2013. (Sean Kilpatrick /THE CANADIAN PRESS)

Canada's native leaders have petitioned the Prime Minister and the Governor-General to gather three weeks from now to discuss perceived failings in the treaty relationships – but an Ontario

chief on a hunger strike to force such a meeting says she can't wait that long.

Theresa Spence, the chief of the impoverished community of Attawapiskat, who has been fasting for 24 days to demand the face-to-face discussion, has told her supporters and other native leaders that a meeting must occur within the next 72

hours, and she will not start eating until it has begun. Raymond Robinson, an elder from the Cross Lake First Nation in Manitoba, is forgoing food along with her.

"There are plans in the works for a meeting in the future. That's fine. That can go ahead and planning can take place," Grand Chief Stan Louttit of the Mushkegowuk Council, which includes Attawapiskat, said after visiting Ms. Spence on Thursday afternoon. "But I think what's required for the life of these individuals here, for the life of the chief, is that there needs to be a meeting with the Prime Minister soon, within the next two or three days."

Those who were allowed inside Ms. Spence's teepee on a tiny island in the Ottawa River just a few kilometres from the Parliament buildings on Thursday said she is growing weaker.

Among her many visitors was Shawn Atleo, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. Two days earlier, Mr. Atleo had sent an invitation to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor-General David Johnston asking that they meet with native leaders on Jan. 24 – the anniversary of last year's Crown-first-nations gathering where the two sides agreed to work together to build a new and more trusting relationship.

But any goodwill that resulted from that meeting appears to have dissipated over the past 12 months. And many first nations people are angry at a spate of federal legislation they say will negatively affect them and their communities. They have been staging rallies and blockades across Canada since early December under the banner of Idle No More.

Ms. Spence, who says Canada is no longer living up to the treaty signed by her ancestors, has become the unanticipated hero of the national protest movement.

The demonstrations are being organized at the local level and often without the sanction of first nations leaders. But even if they are not directly behind Idle No More, many chiefs, including Mr. Atleo, have voiced their support for it.

"All first nations across Canada stand united and in solidarity in advancing this urgent call for action and attention," Mr. Atleo wrote in his letter asking Mr. Harper and Mr. Johnston to come to the meeting "on a matter of increased urgency."

Neither the Prime Minister nor the Governor-General responded to the invitation Thursday. Both said they would give the AFN their answer in due course.

But if Mr. Atleo thought the acceptance of the invitation alone would end the hunger strikes, he was wrong. Danny Metatawabin, a spokesman for Ms. Spence, said Jan. 24 is simply too far away. "She can't wait that long," Mr. Metatawabin said. "If the chiefs want to convene a meeting on the 24th based on the Crown-first-nations gathering, then that's okay, too. But we would suggest a meeting before that."

Mr. Atleo refused to answer reporters' questions after leaving Ms. Spence's teepee. As he dashed for his car, he said he appreciated the opportunity to talk with her. "She is in good spirits and standing strong and we're with her," he said.

Carolyn Bennett, a Liberal MP who is a medical doctor, also paid Ms. Spence a visit on Thursday.

"I think she is feeling weak, weaker when she walks," Dr. Bennett said. "She's got a lot of thirst and she is sleeping a lot more. So she is worried that the 24th is too late." But when asked how long Ms. Spence could survive on her diet of fish broth and herbal tea, Dr. Bennett said it is impossible to tell.

"It depends," she said, "on how the body reacts."